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RE: Public comment on HB 495 - An act funding an independent study to determine the feasibility of restoring passenger rail service from Danbury to the Massachusetts border.

Representative Guerrero, Senator Maynard, Senator Boucher, Representative O'Dea and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 495: An act funding an independent study to determine the feasibility of restoring passenger rail service from Danbury to the Massachusetts border.

I am writing to you as a resident of North Canaan, CT, in support of updating and restoring passenger rail service through Northwest Connecticut. I believe the bill H.B. 495 sponsored by Senator Clark Chapin is a good step towards restoring this service, and yielding the data which will show the positive economic impact of this service. I've been a firm advocate of restoring passenger rail service for a number of years, and am one of the founding members of the citizen led petition "Restore our Railways".

The railroads are currently critical to our small communities of the Northwest Corner for freight service, but in order to grow and thrive we need to expand this to passenger service as well.

In the town of North Canaan, we have 4 major manufacturers which rely on the freight rail to ship their goods to market. These companies provide good, high paying jobs to local residents within our community. We need to update the existing rail infrastructure to ensure these companies remain in our towns.

However, in order to grow and thrive into the future, we must be able to attract new families and businesses to our towns. Passenger rail service allows the Northwest Corner of CT to connect with the rest of Connecticut and beyond, making us less reliant on automobile traffic. This is what people want today from the places where they choose to live. In order to thrive, we need to provide that option.

An economic study was performed on this very issue recently (attached), which gave some very impressive numbers:

- Increased economic output of \$625M for the region over 10 years
- An average of 600+ new jobs for the region directly from the passenger rail service
- Increased tax revenue in the first decade of \$29.5M

Senator Chapin's independent study of this issue would allow us to corroborate this data, and make an informed decision on rail service. However, on a project of this magnitude we need to look well into the future and make our plans based on economic benefits which may be many years away. Here in NW CT, we need such a project to make sure our towns are prepared for that future. I encourage you to support HB 495 so that we can take the next step in making rail service a reality for our small towns.

Respectfully submitted,
Todd Shearer